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ABSTRACT

Sociologically, the implications of the concept of interdependence are contrary to the explicit aims of education. Interdependence implies that if changes are brought about in one social institution, then the functional interdependence of society may be destroyed. Education is seen as a means to reinforce the status quo. The aims of adult education are seen in terms of individual development and maturation, with little or no reference to the relationship of the individual with the social institutions that make up society itself. If adult education fulfills the functions of pattern maintenance demanded by the interdependence of social institutions to maintain social cohesion, then it imposes constraints upon the individual contrary to the aims of adult education. If its aim is individual fulfillment, then adult education must recognize either that society is socially constructed or that it has neglected the significance of the social constraints. However, if the aims of adult education are to perpetuate and recreate the patterns of existing society, then significant questions need to be posed about the concept of man implicit in its practice. (YLB)

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'Interdependence' is the declared theme of this Conference, so that it is important to recognise that this is a concept that has been in the sociological vocabulary for many decades while adult education thought in both Europe and North America 'tends to embed its feet firmly in psychological approaches'. (Cunningham 1983:257). Since few sociologists of adult education have tackled this topic it is essential that its wider implications should be examined sociologically and that these should be applied to adult education but it is necessary to utilise studies in the sociology of initial (school based) education in order to do so. The general thesis of this paper is that the functions of education in an interdependent society may not be in accord with the expressed aims of many adult educationalists. The paper itself consists of three main parts: an examination of the implication of the concept of interdependence; the aims of adult education; the implication of the preceding discussion for adult education theory.

I. The Concept of Interdependence.

The concept of interdependence owes many of its origins in sociological literature to the early work of Emile Durkheim. In his classical study on the division of labour, he (1933) noted that as the level of technology of a society became more sophisticated there was a corresponding increase in the division of labour in that society. This resulted in an overall decline in the traditional social structures, which he called 'mechanical solidarity' and the emergence of a much more differentiated society. This latter form of society still retained a form of solidarity, which he termed 'organic solidarity.' Organic, in this instance, refers to the evolution of a complex organism, having a higher degree of internal functional specialisation. Giddens (1971:77) summarises this as 'functional interdependence in the division of labour.' Hence, contemporary industrial society may be depicted as one having a form of organic solidarity, in which its different institutions are functionally interdependent. Without interdependence, there could be no society, and the interdependence of the institutions is generally regarded as a form of social homeostasis, so that any change in one institution will produce changes in the other ones, in order to ensure the retention of the social equilibrium. It may immediately be seen that there are certain implications here - nothing may be allowed 'to rock the boat' too much or else the functional

interdependence of society may be destroyed.

Another significant issue that Durkheim focused upon in his study of the division of labour is that since social differentiation does occur, people are no longer bound and identified to and with their social group. As the bonds of social solidarity have been loosened, so people may develop their own individuality. Organic solidarity, therefore, presupposes differences between individuals both in their beliefs and actions. Individualism is an inevitable concomitant of the expansion in the division of labour and as this progresses so commonality declines. Hence, there needs to be an interdependence between people if social groups are to be maintained.

Once it is seen that organic solidarity is a looser form of social relationship than mechanical solidarity, it is important to recognise that the social structures are less stable and contain within them the potentiality for fission. Even so, Talcott Parsons (1951, 1971) a most eminent exponent of Durkheim's ideas, has argued that there are certain functional pre-requisites for the maintenance of a social system and these are: integration, pattern maintenance, goal attainment and adaptation. Provided society has mechanisms to co-ordinate its constituent units, maintain its cultural system, allow its members to achieve their goals and help them adapt to differing experiences it will retain its own identity. Education, clearly, has a significant part to play in interdependent societies and Parsons (1971: 101) recognises that education involves important integrative mechanisms, among them a means for institutionalizing secular culture. For Parsons, therefore, the education system is a means by which the cultural pattern of a society is maintained and transmitted from one generation to the next or, in other words, one of the functions of education is to ensure the continuity of the social system.

Parsons (1951: 29-30) also notes that for society to survive it needs to allow for 'meeting a minimum proportion of the needs of individual actors' so that there is a minimum of control over potentially disruptive behaviour. He recognises that when there might be conflict, control has to be exercised but what he did not do was to suggest that education might actually be a mechanism of control although he does see it as an agency of socialization into the culture of the society in which it occurs.

A fundamental weakness in Parsons' formulation is that he assumes that the culture to be transmitted is a homogeneity and that it occurs by common agreement in that society. He omitted consideration of Marx's and Engels' (1970:64) famous observation that:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the

means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the idea of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; the division of labour..... manifests itself also in the ruling class or the division of mental and material labour.....

It is this analysis that the Italian Communist leader Gramsci recognised as significant in his concept of cultured hegemony: the idea that the 'dominant form of cultural capital consists of those attitudes, dispositions, tastes, linguistic competencies, and systems of meaning that the ruling-class deem as being legitimate. This specific form of cultural capital is institutionalized in schools and is passed off as natural, unchanging, and even eternal.' (Giroux 1981:71). Gramsci had no objections to children being exposed to this cultural capital, only that there should come a time when working class values should be built into the system in this way. But other analysts of education have been more radical. Bowles and Gintis (1976) have accused the American school system of reproducing the social relations of capitalist production and Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) of cultural reproduction. Basically, they are claiming that among the functions of education has been that of control of the working classes by means of inculcating into them ideas that are acceptable to the elite. All of these analyses are of initial education, so what of adult education? Westwood (1980:43) argues that:

Adult education with its middle class bias, its uniformity within a common core of curriculum..... has a re-inforcing role. But in relation to the concept of hegemony it can be seen to have a much clearer role in maintaining the status quo, engendering a state of consensus and contributing positively to the mechanisms whereby hegemony is maintained.

Thus it may be seen that interdependence means in functional terms that education is seen to re-inforce the status quo, and that this analysis is consistent from both conservative thinkers, such as Talcott Parsons, and from more recent marxist scholars. In this analysis, for different reasons, the individual has to be contained either for the sake of the smooth functioning of the social system or in the best interests of the elite. But this is not what Gramsci considered to be the aims of adult education. Entwistle (1979:111-112)

writes:

It is a mistake to look at Gramsci as authority for the view that radical social change, involving the replacement of our hegemony by another, can be engineered primarily through formal educational institutions, especially those concerned with the schooling of children. If school had to be disinterested, especially in not prematurely foreclosing avenues into any occupation, this was not the case for adult educational institutions. As adults, now committed to a particular occupation, workers had to be educated both to the technical aspects of work and to its political and cultural implications.

Gramsci, like Knowles - but for totally different reasons, separates initial and adult education but in this case Gramsci focuses upon its aims.

II. The Aims of Adult Education.

Few systematic philosophies of adult education have been written, but it is necessary to examine some of the writers in this field in order to see precisely what are the aims of adult education. Bergin (1967:30-1) suggests that some of the major goals of adult education are:

- to help the learner achieve a degree of happiness and meaning in life;
- to help the learner understand himself, his talents and limitations, and his relationships with persons;
- to help adults recognise and understand the need for lifelong learning;
- to provide conditions and opportunities to help the adult advance in the maturation process spiritually, culturally, physically, politically, and vocationally;
- to provide, where needed, education for survival, in literacy, vocational skills, and health measures.

Note immediately, the emphasis Bergin places upon the individual and the individual's development. Lawson (1975), likewise, examines the development of persons but does not refer to the social structures. Knowles (1980:27-36) actually sees the adult educator's mission in relation to satisfying three distinct sets of needs and goals - those of individuals, institutions and society. His analysis is clearly wider than the other two, but his emphasis remains on the individual, spending twice as much space on the individual than on the other two together. Even if the three sets of needs were distinct, which is incorrect - as this paper demonstrates implicitly, the concentration

upon the individual reflects the remark by Cunningham with which this paper opened. The emphasis of adult educational thought is upon psychology and the individual. The aims of adult education are seen in terms of individual development and maturation, with little or no reference to the relationship of the individual with the social institution which make up society itself. However, some recent studies in adult education theory that have concentrated upon the self, e.g. Mezirow (1981), have pointed towards the sociological theories that commence with the individual. He mentions the work of Berger and Luckmann (1966) in which they state quite specifically that every individual's construction of reality is social. Reality itself has no meaning but that which is placed upon it as a result of the individual's experience. Schutz (1972) argued that all lived experiences are lacking in meaning until such time as the actor has placed meaning upon them. For him (Wagner 1970:87-95) the stranger has to impose meaning on his experiences because those of the in-group are not within his taken-for-granted construction of reality. Reality, then, is not objective but subjective. As the self develops, through educative experiences, so the construction of reality will change because the individual brings a different stock of knowledge to bear on his new experiences. Hence, the question may be asked, - is there a reality that is beyond the one that the self constructs? Perhaps one of clearest expressions of this position comes from Blum (1971:131) when he wrote that "... it is easy to see that the methodological character of marriage, war, and suicide is only seen, recognised and made possible through the organised practices of sociology. These regulations do not exist 'out there' in pristine form to which sociologists functionally respond, but rather, they acquire their character as regularities and their features as discernable objects only through the glare of sociological imputation." In other words, there is no objective order beyond the individual, it is the individual who imposes meaning and order upon his experiences, Thus in the teaching and learning situation the teacher and learners together construct reality, it is a 'world-building enterprise' (Esland 1971:111). One of the problems of this extreme view is that it lends itself to such criticisms as implying that social reality is actually constructed by thinking about it (Musgrove 1979: 18)

Like adult education, this sociological approach assumes that the actor has a degree of freedom, unfettered by the constraints of the social order that the previous approach indicated. It is almost as if there are two totally different approaches with two different sets of problems and this is precisely the way that Dawe (1971:550-551) posed the problem:

There are, then two sociologies: a sociology of the social system and a sociology of social action. They are grounded in the diametrically opposed concerns with two central problems, those of order and control. At every level they are in conflict - They posit antithetical views of human nature, of society and of the relationship between the social and the individual. The first asserts the paramount necessity, for society and individual well-being, of external constraint; hence the notion of a social system ontologically and methodologically prior to its participants. The key notion of the second is that of autonomous man, able to realise his full potential and to create a truly human social order only when freed from external constraint. Society is thus the creation of its members; the product of their construction of meaning, and of the action and relationships through which they attempt to *impose* that meaning on their historical situations.

III Implications of the Foregoing Discussion.

It is, therefore, suggested here that the implications of adopting the concept of interdependence are if adult education fulfils the functions of pattern maintenance etc. that the interdependence of social institutions demands so that social cohesion may be maintained, then it imposes constraints upon the individual that appear to be contrary to the aims expressed by some of its most notable exponents. If its aims are individual fulfilment, etc., then adult education is led either into the position of recognising that reality is socially constructed, or else it has to recognise that it has neglected the significance of the social constraints. If, by contrast, the exponents cited here are wrong and its aims are to perpetuate and recreate the patterns of existing society, then there are significant questions that need to be posed about the concept of man implicit in its practice. Whatever position is adopted, Freire's (1972:21) claim that 'every educational practice implies a concept of man and the world, is valid. No education can be neutral.

In sociological theory the debate about agency and structure continues, e.g. Giddens (1979); in some instances it may be seen that they act in harmony but in others there is a dialectical relationship between them. In adult education theory, the need for the debate to begin is considerable, especially as the learning society emerges. Some of the areas in which it might commence, include:

1. the aims of the education of adults (rather than educational objectives)
2. the distinctions between professional continuing education and liberal adult education.
3. the concept of needs: social versus individual
4. lifelong education versus lifelong learning.
5. curriculum knowledge in the education of adults.
6. the implications of different teaching methods.
7. the concept of assessment.
8. the concepts of man
9. the function of adult education.
10. adult education and its relationship to the power and social structures of society.

Conclusion:

This paper has argued that sociologically the implications of the concept of interdependence are contrary to the explicit aims of education as expressed by some of its main exponents. In addition, it has indicated the need to begin a sociological debate about adult education.

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